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President Kennedy's
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CIA and Viet-Nam

Q: Mr. President, could you discuss some of the recent public accounts of CIA activities in South Viet-Nam, particularly in the stories or reports of how the CIA has undertaken certain independent operations, or independent of other elements of the American Government, that are in South Viet-Nam?

A: I must say I think the reports are wholly untrue. The fact of the matter is that Mr. (CIA Director John) McCone sits in the National Security Council. I imagine I see him at least three or four times a week, ordinarily. We have worked very closely together in the National Security Council in the last two months attempting to meet the problems we face in South Viet-Nam. I can find nothing, and I have looked through the record very carefully over the last nine months, and I could go back further, to indicate that the CIA has done anything but support policy. It does not create policy; it attempts to execute it in those areas where it has competence and responsibility. I know that the transfer of Mr. John Richardson (CIA official in Saigon) who is a very dedicated public servant, has led to surmises, but I can just assure you flatly that the CIA has not carried out independent activities but has operated under close control of the Director of Central Intelligence, operating with the cooperation of the National Security Council and under my instructions.

So I think while the CIA may have made mistakes, as we all do, on different occasions, and has had many successes which may go unheralded, in my opinion in this case it is unfair to charge them as they have been charged. I think they have done a good job.